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SOME USES OF BACTERIA.¹

BY DR. H. W. CONN.

Every farmer, of course, appreciates the value of keeping stock, and you all know that you cannot run a farm without your cows, your horses, your sheep, your hens, and your pigs. You do not appreciate, however, that it is just as necessary to keep a stock of bacteria on hand on your farm to carry on your farming operations. The farmer has learned to-day that he must keep a good breed of cows and a good breed of stock in general, but farmers generally do not appreciate that it is equally necessary to keep a good breed of bacteria. You cannot make butter or cheese without cows; you cannot make butter or cheese *satisfactorily* without bacteria. You cannot cultivate your fields without your horses to help you, but all the cultivation that you might give your fields would be useless were it not that these little creatures of which I shall speak this morning come in after you get through and complete the process which you have begun.

Now, probably many of you have never particularly thought that your farm is stocked with bacteria, but they are there. They are in your brooks, in your springs, in your wells, in your rivers; they are in your dairy, in your milk, in your butter, in your cheese, in your barn. They are in the air, they are in the soil, and your manure heap is a paradise for them.

Bacteria are in rather bad odor in the minds of most people, and we are all inclined to look with horror upon them. We have a sort of shrinking when any one speaks to us of the number of bacteria in the milk which we drink. The reason for this, however, is simply an historical one. When bacteria were first discovered it was early noticed that they had a causal relation to disease, and scientists went to work from the very first to investigate diseases in relation to bacte-

¹From Connecticut Agric. Rep. for 1892.

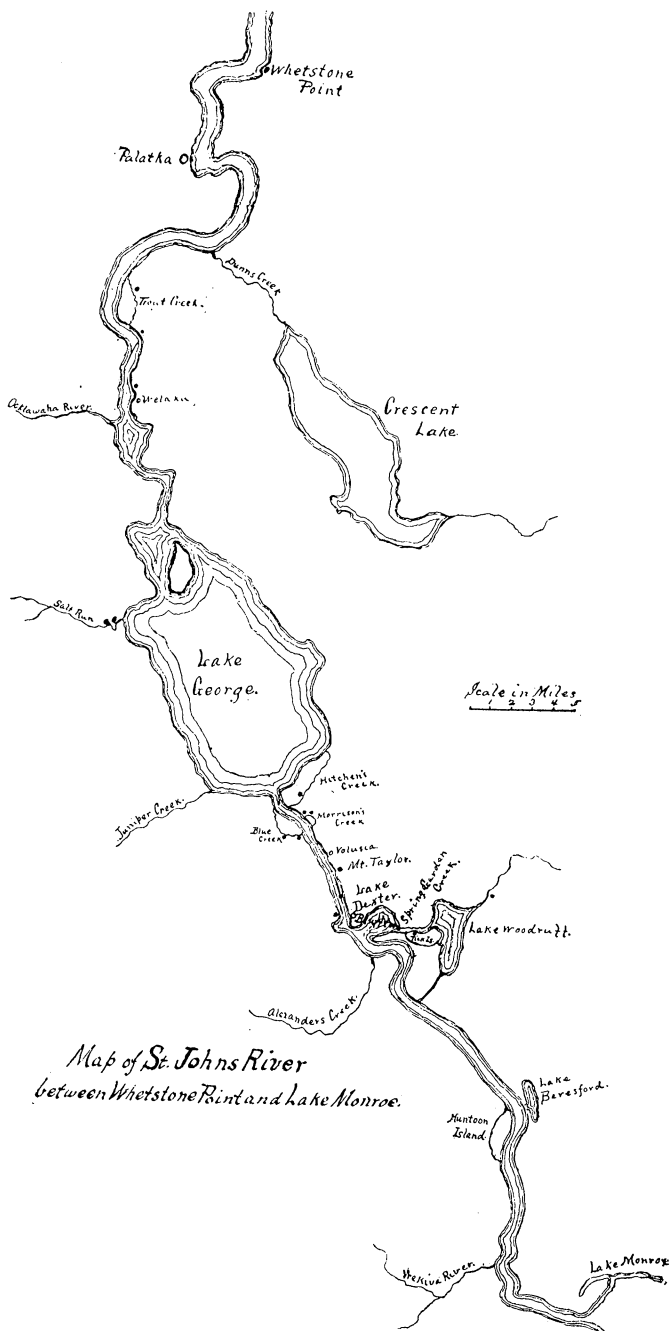
ria. The result was that after a few years a great deal of information had accumulated, showing that bacteria caused diseases. The so-called "epidemics" are usually the result of bacteria, and with minds intent upon this side of the question scientists did not pay much attention to the good that bacteria might do in the world. It was more interesting to study disease. People are very much interested when you begin to tell them why it is that they have small-pox, why it is that they have yellow fever; the other side of the matter, however, is not so interesting.

But the fact is that the bacteria story has only been half told, and thus far it is the smaller half that has been told, if there is such a thing as *the smaller half*. It is true that bacteria are occasionally injurious to us, but it is equally true that they are of direct benefit to us. Hitherto we have looked upon bacteria as belonging to the medical profession; we think the doctors ought to know about them because they produce disease, but ordinary people do not need to bother themselves with these things. But I think before I get through with my talk this morning you will see that bacteria have a very much closer relation to you as *farmers* than they do to the doctors. It is the farmer to-day who ought to understand bacteriology. It is well enough for the medical man to understand the subject also, but bacteriology has already become a medical subject, while the agriculturist has generally neglected it.

I propose in my talk this morning to point out to you a few of the benefits which you as farmers derive from the agency of these microscopic organisms. I shall divide the subject into four heads. First, *miscellaneous*: At the very outset I am going to say a word or two in regard to yeasts. Now, yeasts are not bacteria, but they are microscopic plants closely related to bacteria, and their agency in nature is very similar to that of bacteria in some respects; so I shall say a word or two in regard to them.

What is the function of yeasts? Yeasts are plants which have the power of growing in sugar solutions, and while growing there they break the sugar to pieces and produce from it

PLATE XXIII.



two compounds; one of them is alcohol, and the other one is the gas which we commonly call carbonic acid (CO_2). We make use of yeasts for various purposes along two directions. We may use them either for the purpose of getting the alcohol or for the purpose of getting the carbonic acid. For instance, you want to bake a loaf of bread; you take your dough, you plant yeast in it and set it in a warm place; now, there is always a little sugar in the dough, and the yeast begins to grow, breaking the sugar to pieces, as I have just stated, and produce from it alcohol and carbonic acid. The carbonic acid is a gas, and as the yeast grows and the carbonic acid makes its appearance in the bread, little bubbles are seen in the dough until presently it becomes filled with these little bubbles of carbonic acid gas which render it lighter. Of course, as the gas accumulates the dough swells, or, as we say, it "rises." Then you bake it, and when you take it out of the oven and cut it open you find that the bread is full of little holes. Those little holes are the remains of the bubbles of carbonic acid gas which the yeast produced, and the object of growing the yeast was simply to make those holes in the bread. The bread is light, and the object of the introduction of the yeast is thus accomplished. You cannot bake a loaf of bread, then, without the agency of microscopic organisms.

In the baking of bread we have an instance of the use of carbonic acid alone. In the manufacture of wine the object of the vintner is to get the other product of yeasts, namely, the alcohol. He grows yeasts in his grape juice, usually depending on those from the air. Again there are carbonic acid and alcohol produced and the carbonic acid in this case passes off into the air during the fermentation, while the alcohol remains behind; when the fermentation has continued long enough a considerable amount of alcohol remains in the grape juice, and thus produces the wine. Similarly, in the manufacture of alcohol or of any of the other alcoholic liquors, such as rum or whisky, the same process is made use of; that is, the little yeasts are planted in some sort of sugar solution, it may be molasses, it may be barley; they grow there; there they produce carbonic acid and alcohol; the car-

bonic acid is allowed to go off into the air and the alcohol remains behind. Then by the processes of distillation the alcohol is separated from the fermenting mass. The carbonic acid is all given off into the air in these cases.

In the manufacture of beer the attempt is made to get both products of the yeast growth. In the making of beer the yeast is cultivated in the same way in the malt; alcohol and carbonic acid both are produced. After some fermentation the beer is put into bottles. A certain amount of fermentation takes place after the bottling. The carbonic acid thus produced is dissolved in the liquid and soon accumulates so as to produce considerable pressure. When the bottle is opened it is this gas which causes the froth at the top of the beer. It is the alcohol which produces the intoxicating quality in the beer, but it is the carbonic acid chiefly which gives the beer its sharp, pungent taste. The alcohol aids, of course, to a certain extent, but the carbonic acid is the chief factor in the taste of beer. It may be a little question whether it is proper to use yeasts in this way to produce rum, whisky, alcohol and beer, with the untold miseries which they involve; nevertheless, yeasts are at the foundation of the gigantic industries connected with distilling and brewing operations.

The farmer makes use of them in the manufacture of cider. Yeast from the atmosphere is planted in his apple juice; it attacks the sugar that it finds there, breaks the sugar to pieces, and produces carbonic acid and alcohol as before. The carbonic acid accumulates during the first day or two, and gives the sharp, pungent taste that is noticeable in sweet cider. Later on the alcohol accumulates in larger quantities, and that gives the taste to hard, sour cider. After the cider has fermented for several days the carbonic acid is of second importance; the alcohol accumulates until you get the strong, sharp, intoxicating hard cider. So much, then, for the uses to which we put yeasts.

Now, leaving yeasts, turn for a moment to the consideration of a few miscellaneous phenomena connected with bacteria. I may take as a starting point this very product that I mentioned last, namely, hard cider. Your yeasts produce alcohol

in your cider. You let your cider stand in a barrel for several months, and little by little a change takes place in it; little by little the oxygen is taken out of the air and handed over to the alcohol, and when the alcohol gets hold of the oxygen it is no longer alcohol; it becomes acetic acid, and your cider is changed into vinegar. Now, it has been determined that it is through the agency of bacteria that the alcohol succeeds in getting hold of the oxygen. Bacteria grow on the surface of hard cider, forming a sort of scum, producing, indeed, what we call "mother of vinegar." These bacteria growing on the surface in some way take oxygen out of the air, pass it down into the fluid, give it to the alcohol, and when the alcohol gets hold of it it becomes acetic acid and you get vinegar where you originally had cider. The manufacture of vinegar, then, is a process dependent upon the growth of bacteria.

The manufacture of lactic acid is a process somewhat of the same character. Lactic acid is not a commercial article of very great importance, but still there are some factories in this country that manufacture it and put it upon the market to be sold for certain purposes. In the making of lactic acid the manufacturer makes constant use of bacteria. By the cultivation of bacteria in milk the milk sugar is changed into lactic acid, which the manufacturer separates from the milk and puts upon the market. So you see that the manufacturer of lactic acid is wholly dependent upon bacteria; he could never produce it without their aid.

Perhaps under this head of "Miscellaneous" I may just refer to a matter which is of considerable practical importance, and that is the matter of ensilage. We do not know very much about the theory in regard to the management of a silo at the present time, but we do know that the whole process of procuring proper and sweet ensilage is a process of properly managing bacteria growth. If you manage the bacteria growth correctly your ensilage will remain sweet and will become a food which is very desirable for your cattle; but if you do not manage the bacteria growth correctly your ensilage will decay, it will become sour, undergo fermentations, and you will suffer

from it. It is, then, to bacteria that the farmer owes his new process of obtaining food through a silo.

I will pass now to the consideration of the second topic, and that is, the relation of bacteria to dairy matters. I have already once or twice before in your meetings brought up this question of the relation of bacteria to the dairy. At the meeting a year ago some of you may remember that we considered the subject of the fermentations of milk, when we saw that all of these fermentations, most of which are very undesirable, are connected with the growth of micro-organisms. Now, so far as milk is concerned, bacteria are pretty much of a nuisance. The milkman does not want them; they produce the souring of his milk; they make his milk bitter or slimy; sometimes they make it blue, and they produce all sorts of abnormal fermentations which a milkman does not want. But I am not to consider that side of the question this morning, and I will pass the subject of milk and turn for a moment to a consideration of the relation of bacteria to butter-making and cheese-making.

Every butter-maker is acquainted with the fact that in the normal process of making butter the cream is collected from the milk and then is allowed to ripen. It is put in some sort of vessels and allowed to stand in a warm place for a day or so, and during that time immense changes are taking place in it. At the end of the time the cream has become slightly soured, it has acquired a rather peculiar, pleasant, indescribable odor, and it has reached the proper condition for churning. During that time our microscope tells us that bacteria have been multiplying with absolutely inconceivable rapidity. They multiply so that they increase during a day perhaps five to six thousand-fold. Each bacterium with which you start when you begin to ripen your cream produces at least six thousand by the end of twenty-four hours, and usually they will produce a much larger number than that. So that bacteria are growing in this ripening cream with absolutely incredible rapidity. Now you butter-makers know that you gain some advantage from ripening the cream, or at least you think you do. You think your butter churns a little easier and that you

get a little more butter from a given quantity of cream if you ripen it, and, above all (and this, perhaps, may be regarded as the chief value of ripening), the butter acquires that peculiar, delicate, pleasant aroma which is essential to a first-class quality of butter, that peculiar aroma which is not acquired if you do not properly ripen your cream before churning it.

Now the explanation of the production of that aroma is simply this: These bacteria are agents of decomposition. Bacteria, as they grow in any solution, tend to decompose it or pull it to pieces. If they grow in an egg they decompose the egg and cause it to putrefy and decay, and when they begin to grow in your cream they begin the same process of decomposition. If you should let your cream ripen for a week or two you would very readily see that the process of decomposition had taken place, and your cream would become very offensive. The moment you begin to ripen your cream the bacteria begin to decompose it. Now as the result of decomposition a great many chemical products are produced, and they have all sorts of smells and tastes. If you should let decomposition go far enough you would get the bad odor of decay, but you do not get that odor when decomposition begins. The first of the decomposition products are rather pleasant in odor and pleasant in taste, and if you churn your cream at that stage of decomposition your butter is flavored with the early decomposition products. This flavor is the aroma of good butter, this is what fancy butter-makers sell in the market and get a high price for. They get a high price, then, for the decomposition products of bacteria, for a proper tasting butter brings a higher price than that which does not have this aroma, and the aroma is the gift of bacteria. You may ask what becomes of the bacteria? It really makes little difference what becomes of them. Some go into the butter-milk, some go off in water used in washing, some go into the butter and the salt kills them. It is no matter where they go. After the butter is churned they are no longer of any importance to you or any one else; their career, so far as the dairy is concerned, is ended.

If the butter-maker owes something to bacteria the cheese-maker owes everything to them. The butter-maker cannot get the proper aroma without the agency of bacteria, but the cheese-maker cannot get anything. Of course, you all know that fresh cheese is very inane and tasteless. Nobody likes fresh cheese. It has sort of a curdy taste and is quite unpalatable. You know, however, that after cheese is made it is set aside for a number of weeks to ripen. It may ripen several weeks, or, perhaps, months. Sometimes in the case of the best cheeses it may be ripened a year or more. Now during that ripening process exactly the same changes are taking place that I have mentioned in cream. The bacteria are growing, are attacking the casein, and pulling it to pieces. They produce many changes in it and cause an accumulation of all sorts of materials which have peculiar tastes, and little by little the cheese is ripened. After a while the cheese begins to have a pleasant taste and then a strong taste, and if you leave it long enough you get a very strong cheese. The longer you ripen a cheese the stronger its taste becomes. An old cheese is always a strong cheese, a fresh cheese is always a mild cheese. The shorter the time you cultivate bacteria in it of course the slighter will be the changes which they produce; the longer you cultivate the bacteria the stronger becomes the cheese.

Now in the ripening of cheese we find the cheese manufacturer's greatest difficulty. Every cheese manufacturer knows that under conditions which seem to be exactly alike he may get good cheese and he may get bad cheese. His cheese may become tainted, it may become spotted with little red spots or some other abnormal conditions may appear which he cannot account for. It would be the greatest boon possible to the cheese-maker if we could in some way enable him to correct his abnormal ripening processes and be able always positively to insure the proper sort of ripening. Now this is plainly a matter which is connected with the planting of the proper kind of bacteria in a cheese and planting them under proper conditions. Different kinds of cheeses are on our markets. We have the Edam cheese, we have the pineapple cheese, we

have the Neufchatel cheese, we have the Limburger cheese and many other kinds. Of course we all know that these different cheeses have very different flavors. Now in the production of these different kinds of cheeses there are different methods used. For instance, in the manufacture of Edam cheese the cheese-maker puts a little slimy milk into the milk that he is going to make into his cheese. That slimy milk contains a certain species of bacteria, and that peculiar species connected with that slimy milk produces the peculiar flavor which we get in the Edam cheese. Sometimes cheese is allowed to ripen soft for a few days before it is pressed, and when thus ripened different kinds of bacteria grow in it and grow in it more rapidly and produce different odors. Experiments have just been begun along this direction which show that it is possible, artificially, to ripen cheese abnormally. You can take certain species of bacteria and grow them in cheese, and you get a very atrociously tasting cheese, and you can take others and get a very good cheese. Now in the use of yeasts we have learned to plant yeast in our bread; we have learned to plant yeasts in our material that we want to ferment, if we are going to make alcohol or if we are going to make beer. The brewer has learned that he must use an artificially prepared yeast. He has learned that if he simply allow the malt to ferment naturally through the agency of atmosphere yeasts he does not know what he will get. It will ferment, undoubtedly, but it will be likely to ferment in an abnormal manner. He, therefore, plants a pure culture of the proper yeasts. But we have not yet learned to plant bacteria in the same way. The cheese-maker has not yet learned to cultivate bacteria as the brewer has learned to cultivate his yeasts. Some day, I think we may say in the not far distant future, after our Experiment Stations have had time to work upon this matter a little longer, the cheese-maker is going to be told of some way in which he can cultivate bacteria as the brewer does his yeast, and then he will know what kinds of bacteria will produce a badly-ripened cheese and what kinds will produce an exceedingly good cheese. The time is coming; it has not come yet, but when it does come we can see that

there will be a tremendous development of the cheese industry in this country.

We know there are four or five hundred species of bacteria in the world. They all produce different sorts of decomposition, they all produce different odors and different flavors, and when our scientific stations have taught our cheese-makers to cultivate their bacteria and plant particular kinds of bacteria in the milk of which they are going to make cheese perhaps we are going to have four or five hundred different kinds of cheese. For aught we can see it may be that the various species of bacteria will produce different flavored cheeses, and perhaps fifty years from now, perhaps in less time, a man may go to the store and order a particular kind of cheese that was made by a peculiar kind of bacteria and another one made by another kind. We cannot tell what possible development there may be of the cheese industry in the future, and whereas, now the cheese-maker must depend very largely upon accident for the particular kind of flavor he is going to get in his product, then he will be able to tell absolutely what he must use in order to be able to produce the flavor that he wants. The result will be a great development of the cheese industry, if such time ever comes.

There will be another advantage in this development when it comes. We all know that once in a while cheese becomes poison. Every one has read in the newspapers accounts of people who have been poisoned by eating cheese. Under certain conditions cheese is very distinctly poisonous, and has produced very many cases of sickness and many cases of death. Now our chemists have studied this poisonous cheese. They have found that it is poisonous because of the production of a peculiar chemical substance in it which they have called "tyrotoxin." They have found, further, that this tyrotoxin is a poison produced by a certain species of bacteria. Once in a while that poisonous kind of bacteria gets into milk. The cheese manufacturer is entirely innocent; he cannot help it, because he has no means of knowing anything about it. But occasionally they get in and his cheese is ripened then under the agency of these injurious bacteria. The result is

that his cheese becomes poisonous, and while he is perfectly innocent of any intentional wrong, the evil is done. Now when our cheese-makers have learned to apply to the manufacture of cheese the processes which our brewers have learned in the manufacture of beer, these troubles can be prevented. Twenty years ago a Frenchman, Pasteur, undertook to make an investigation of the diseases of beer, and he found that they could be prevented by the use of a few simple remedies which prevented the growth of the wrong kinds of yeasts or the wrong kinds of bacteria in it. His methods were soon applied to the whole brewery industry in France and also to the manufacture of wine, and the result has been that those diseases which used to be so common and so troublesome to the vintners and the brewers have practically disappeared. So, then, when we in the future learn to apply similar methods to the manufacture of cheese we may hope for the disappearance of all diseases of cheese, including the red specks in cheese, tainted cheeses of all sorts, and also the disease which makes cheese poisonous, as just mentioned.

You see, then, that to the dairy interests bacteria are of distinct value. They give the aroma to your butter, and they give the whole flavor to your cheese, or at least the chief flavor. Without them your butter would not command so good a price in the market; without them your cheese would not command any price.

(To be continued.)